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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL
118
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THE SPARROW NET 1 OF 4
EAGLE AWARDS 2006 WINNER
HIROAKI SAMURA
BLADE
OF THE IMMORTAL
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by DANA LEWIS
lettering and retouch by TOMOKO SAITO
cover colors by RYAN HILL

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI

Immortal *rōnin*, vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge

RIN

Last heir of the Mutenichi-*ryū dojō* destroyed by the Ittō-*ryū*.

DŌA

Dōa, an Ittō-*ryū* warrior, is slowly befriending Rin, with neither of them knowing their real connection.

HABAKI KAGIMURA

Powerful *bangashira*, and former head of the disbanded Mugai-*ryū*

GIICHI

Former Mugai-*ryū* assassin, saved Hyakurin from a cruel fate–yet led Manji into Kagimura's clutches

HYAKURIN

Injured, former Mugai-*ryū* assassin, aiding Rin in her search for Manji

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Imprisoned in an underground cell, Manji is an unwilling participant in Habaki Kagimura's "immortality experiments." Burando, Kagimura's lead medical examiner, fails to transfer the powers of the *kessen-chu* to another human, and he loses his grip on reality after too many prisoners die under his watch. When he cracks under pressure, Burando is sentenced to life imprisonment. While searching for Manji, Rin and Hyakurin are disappointed to find that Giichi is now a dispirited, inebriated drifter.

designer SCOTT COOK editorial assistant RYAN JORGENSEN
editor PHILIP SIMON publisher MIKE RICHARDSON

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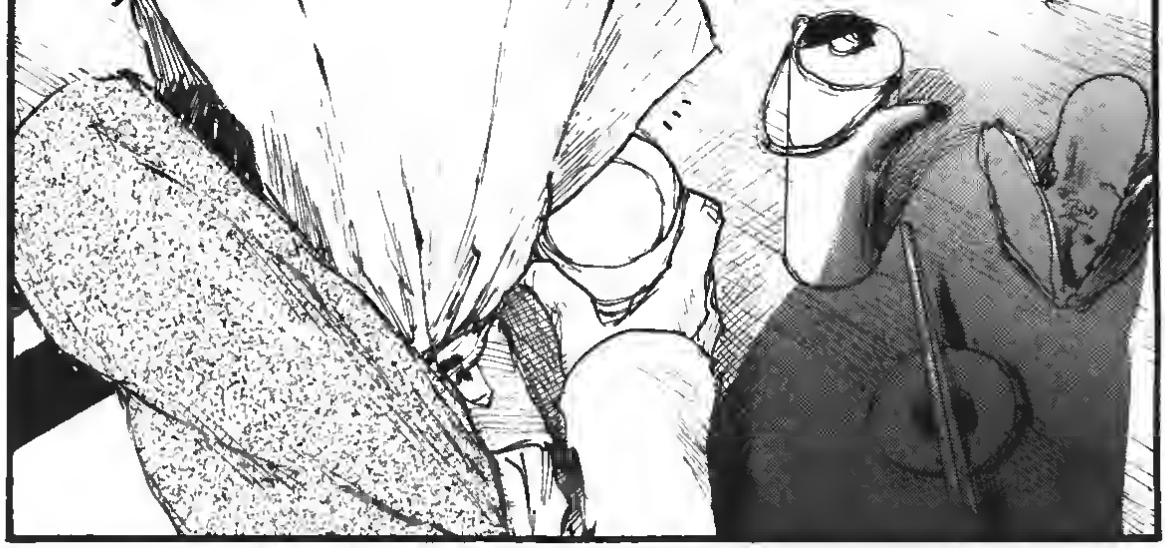
無限の住人

THE SPARROW NET

-part one-



ANYONE SITTING HERE?

BLACK SOYBEANS, STEWED VEGGIES, AND *OKARA!*
COMIN' UP!

.....
.....
.....
hhaff...
THAT BALD-IE...
HYAKURIN- GO ON AHEAD.
I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO TELL HER.
SOMETHING YOU DON'T WANT ME TO KNOW?

SOMETHING THAT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS.
WHAT ?!
HMF!
SMALL FRY...?
JUST A NO-BODY...?

I NEVER DID KNOW WHAT HE WAS THINKING.
BUT YESTERDAY, WHEN HE SAID HIS BOY HAD DIED...
...IT FELT LIKE A DOOR OPENED.
I THOUGHT... HE MIGHT LET ME PEEK IN.
AND THEN WHAT? I'M NOT WORTHY...?
YOU ALL ALONE?

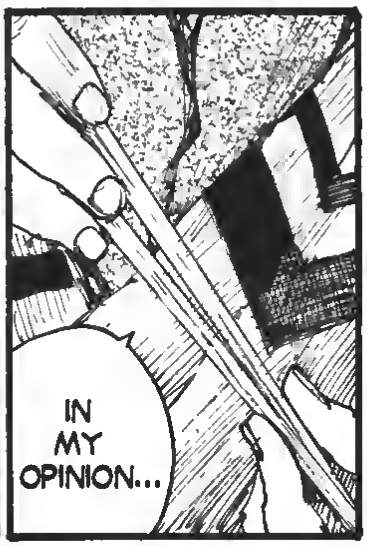
...AS YOU SEE.
LIKE, IS THERE A WIFE?
OH, NOT THAT.
...IN A WAY.
AH HAH HAH!
SORRY! BUT DRINKING ALONE, YOU KNOW?
SO DULL YOU JUST DON'T TASTE YOUR SAKE OR FOOD ANYMORE.
ANY KIDS?
...NOT YET.
GUESS NOT. YOU LOOK YOUNG.
BUT DON'T TELL ME YOU DON'T WANT AN HEIR?

...HMM... I WONDER.
PERHAPS NOT...
...WOW...
THAT'S PRETTY WEIRD.
I MEAN, EVEN SOME DIRT-POOR SAMURAI OUT THERE WANTS HIS HEIR SO BAD...
...HE'D JUST AS SOON KILL A GIRL AT BIRTH IF IT HELPED HIS SON SURVIVE.
BUT KNOW WHAT? YOU'RE OKAY... WHO NEEDS HEIRS? I FEEL FOR A SAMURAI'S SON.
LAYING ALL THAT PARENTAL SHIT ON HIM. DREAMS. AMBI-TIONS.

IT'S FUNNY WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT.
JUST 'CAUSE SOMEONE'S GOT HALF YOUR BLOOD... YOU MAKE *HIM* CLEAN UP YOUR MESS.
...'BOUT KIDS DYING BEFORE THEIR FOLKS.
I MEAN, WORLD'S *FULL* OF STORIES...
OH.
SORRY.
DON'T LISTEN TO ME. I'M JUST... REMEMBER-ING.
ACTUAL-LY...

...IN A SAMURAI CLAN I KNOW...
...THE SON DIED BEFORE THE FATHER.

AND IT SEEMS SOME UNFUL-FILLED DREAMS...
...WERE THEN FORCED UPON THE *GRAND-SON*.
YEAH?


IN MY OPINION...

...IF A MAN TALKS OF DREAMS AND AMBI-TIONS...
...HE SHOULD BE PREPARED TO ACHIEVE THEM HIMSELF... IN HIS OWN LIFETIME.

IT'S *ABSURD* TO PASS THEM ON TO AN HEIR.
A MAN SHOULD REALIZE... WHEN HIS DREAMS ARE JUST *TOO BIG*.

UH-HUHN...
YEAH... YOU'RE *RIGHT*.
YOU SAY *GOOD THINGS*.
ONLY...
...IF A CHILD *MUST* HONOR INHERITED AMBI-TIONS...
...WHAT CAN HE DO BUT POUR HIS *SOUL* INTO THE CHASE?
NOT SAYING "NO" WHILE HE STILL CAN.
NOT QUESTION-ING GOOD OR *EVIL*...
...OR... HIS OWN ABILITY.
NOT THINKING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS ONCE HE ACHIEVES HIS GOAL... OR IF HE *CAN'T*.
CHARGING BLINDLY AHEAD. HIS LIFE A *HAZE*.

SUCH IS THE POWER OF THE BOND BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD.
A POWER THAT SHOULD BE USED *WISELY*.
DON'T BE A FOOL AND IMPOSE YOUR DREAMS ON AN HEIR...
...BUT MAKE YOURSELF... EXCEP-TIONAL...
FIRST, ACHIEVE SOMETHING YOURSELF.
...IN A TANGIBLE OR INTANGIBLE WAY.
MAYBE THEN, AND *ONLY* THEN, YOU CAN THINK ABOUT WHO SHOULD CARRY IT ON.

...SPLEN-
DID
FAMILY.
AHH HAH HAH!
I GET IT.
YOUNG SIR,
YOU GOTTA
BE FROM
SOME...
...EH
HEH
HEH.
...DOWN
ON HIS
LUCK.
YOU
JEST.
I'M
JUST A
KACHI...

AHH... AH... HIC!
SOME-HOW, TODAY...
...THE SAKE WAS GREAT. HEH HEH!
WONDER IF... HIC ...WE'LL MEET AGAIN?
IF OUR FATES ENTWINE.
NYAHH HAH HAH HAH!
YOU'RE A GOOD MAN! YOU REALLY ARE!

TWO STORE-HOUSES. TWO...
IT'S GOTTA BE TH-THIS PLACE.
HAH? WAIT!
URRGF! HIC!

URRP!

THINK I SAW HER YESTER-DAY...

OUR CONTACT'S GOTTA--

WOW...
EEYUCK! WHAT A STINKING DIVE!
OOF!

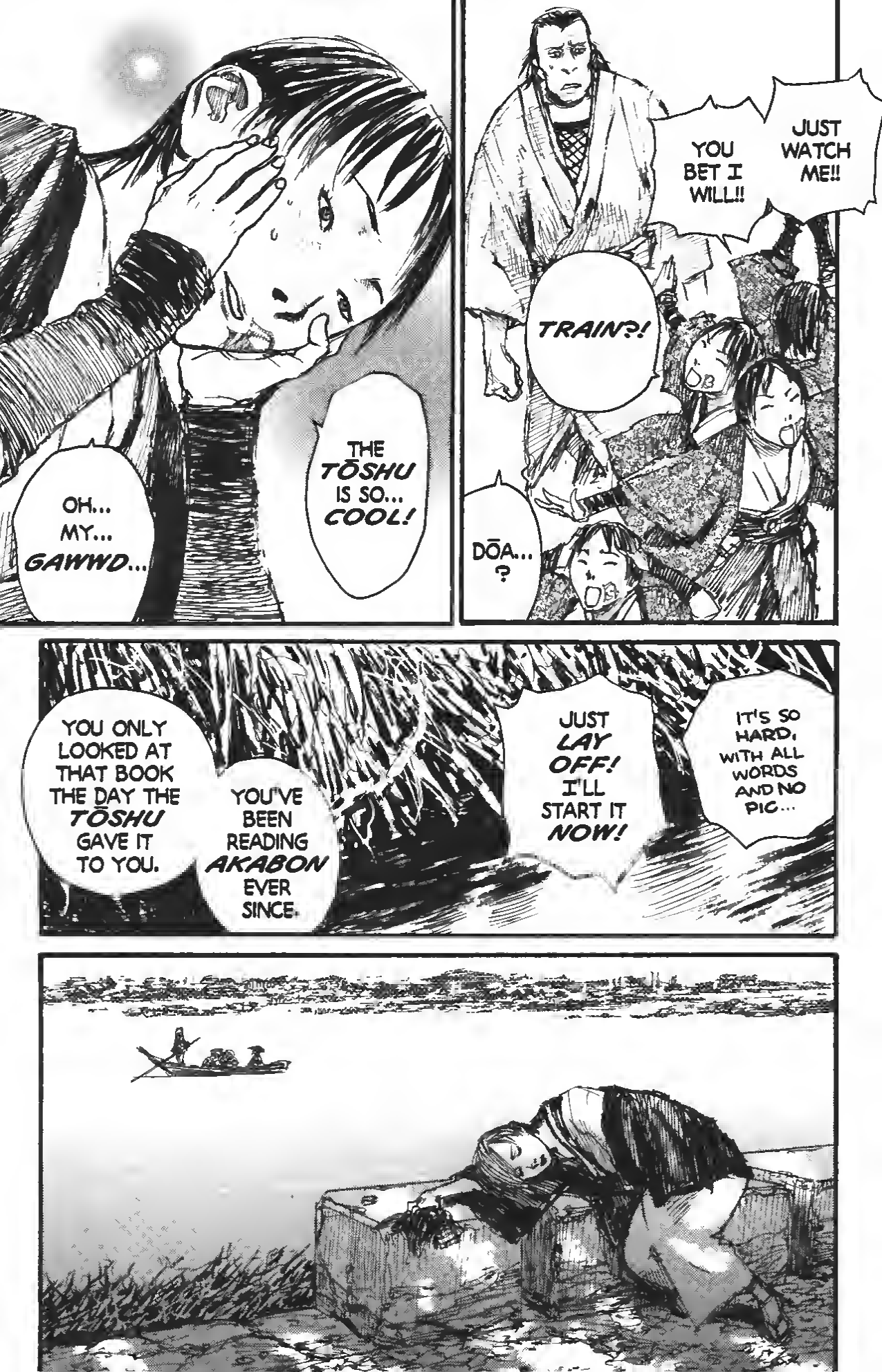
WHAT'D SHE--?!

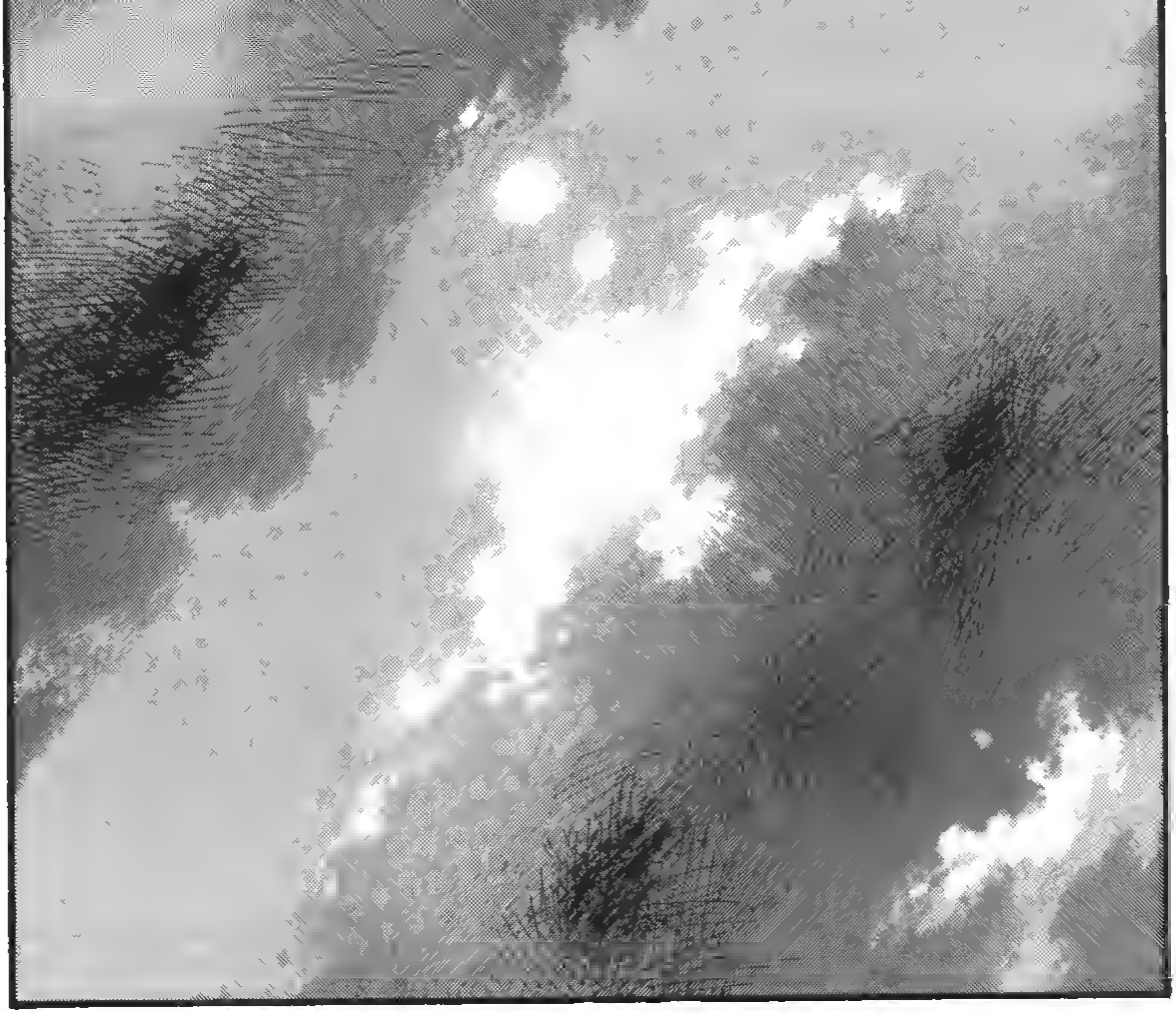
ISAKU.
DŌA.
OVER HERE.
TŌSHU ?!
T-TO--
..I TOLD YOU TO CALL ME BOSS IN PUBLIC, YES?
I-I'M SORRY!
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

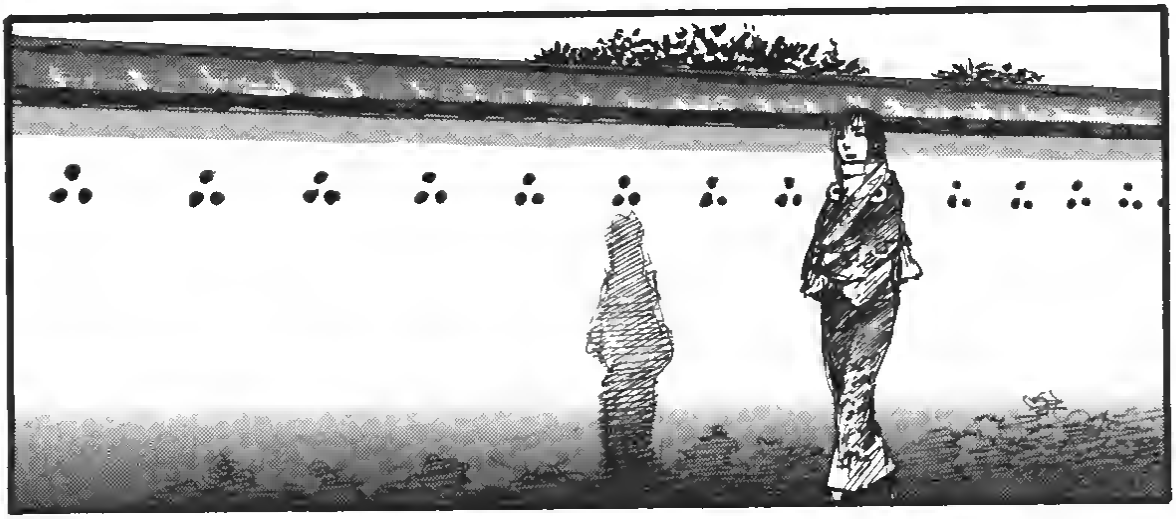
NO DOUBT YOU'VE NOTICED. THE POLICE HAVE BEEN OUT IN FULL FORCE...
...THIS PAST MONTH.
I THOUGHT IT LESS RISKY IF WE MET BY DAY.
IF THEY SAW US RENDEZVOUS AT NIGHT, THEY MIGHT ARREST US.
WATCH IT, YOU TWO! YOU'RE ALREADY WANTED.
GET IN ANY MORE TROUBLE, AND IT'S OVER. ENGRAVE THAT IN YOUR HEARTS!
WELL... ENOUGH.
DŌA. I HEAR YOU'RE GOING BY "YOSHINO"...?
YES, SIR!
I GOT THE NAME FROM THE HONCHŌ SUIKODEN THE TOSH--THE "BOSS" GAVE ME.
I PERCEIVE IN ITS IMPLICIT PATRIOTISM AN ECHO OF THE ITTŌ-RYŪ.
HOH! YOU SURPRISE ME.

I GAVE IT TO YOU SO YOU'D LEARN MORE KANJI FOR LIFE HERE IN EDO...
...BUT I FEARED IT WAS A TRIFLE DIFFICULT.
YET YOU READ IT THROUGH. I'M DELIGHTED.
ISAKU. GIVE THIS TO KASHIN KOJI.
WE'LL MEET AGAIN IN A MONTH.
EHH?! YOU'RE LEAVING AL-READY?
YES.

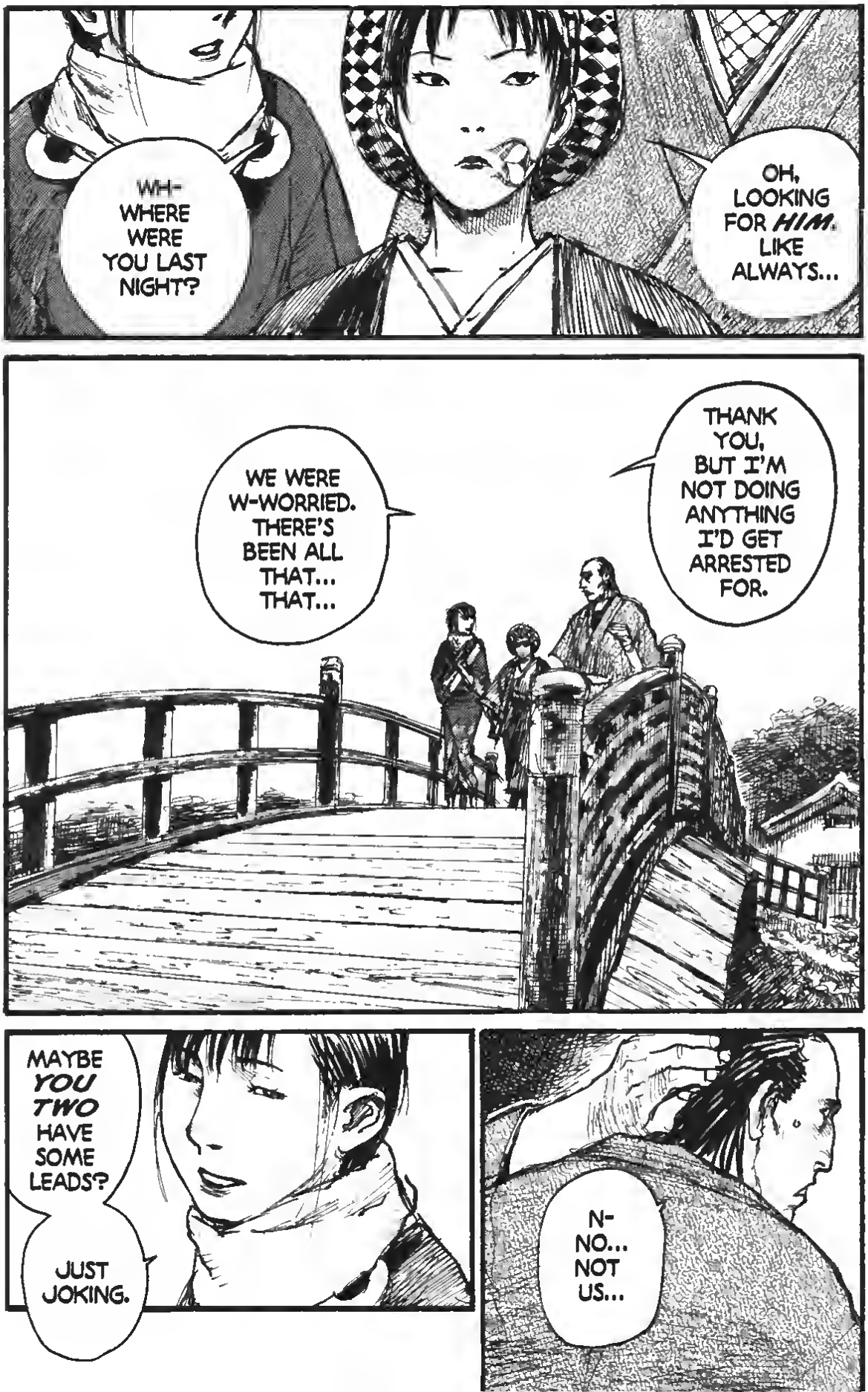
ISAKU. DŌA. WE RETURN TO BATTLE WHEN THE COLD RETURNS. THAT SHOULD PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS.
TRAIN... SO YOU DON'T GET RUSTY.
YES, SIR!


OH... MY... GAWWD...
THE TŌSHU IS SO... COOL!
DŌA...?
TRAIN?!
YOU BET I WILL!!
JUST WATCH ME!!
YOU ONLY LOOKED AT THAT BOOK THE DAY THE TŌSHU GAVE IT TO YOU.
YOU'VE BEEN READING AKABON EVER SINCE.
JUST LAY OFF! I'LL START IT NOW!
IT'S SO HARD, WITH ALL WORDS AND NO PIC...





OH?


WH-
WHERE
WERE
YOU LAST
NIGHT?
OH,
LOOKING
FOR *HIM*.
LIKE
ALWAYS...
WE WERE
W-WORRIED.
THERE'S
BEEN ALL
THAT...
THAT...
THANK
YOU,
BUT I'M
NOT DOING
ANYTHING
I'D GET
ARRESTED
FOR.
MAYBE
YOU
TWO
HAVE
SOME
LEADS?
JUST
JOKING.
N-
NO...
NOT
US...

OH! RIGHT!
WONDER IF WE SHOULDA TOLD HIM...?
TOLD HIM WHAT?
YOU KNOW... OUR RUN-IN WITH THE DŌSHIN.
HUH? WHY? IT'S NOT LIKE WE'LL EVER SEE 'EM AGAIN.
BE-SIDES...
YOU MEN SEARCH OVER THERE!
YES, SIR!
...HE'S GOT ENOUGH WORRIES.
I G-GUESS SO.
?

?!
AH?!
WHAT THE--
?!
.....
.....
ME--
ME--
MENNN!!
IT'S THEM!

HWSH!!
DŌA!
OWW! WHY'RE YOU--?!
HOHH! MISCRE-ANTS!

UH, UH, IF...IT'S ABOUT THE OTHER DAY...
TOLD--
HAH HAH! HAH! YOU BLOCK-HEAD!!
YIK!
EXCUSES DON'T WORK ON NAKIZŌ OF THE SUMIDA!
IN OTHER WORDS... ARE YOU STUPID?! YOU THINK YOU CAN DRAW SWORDS ON THE HATCHŌ-BORI?!
AND LOOK! YOUR LITTLE GIRL'S DONE IT TWICE! TWICE!

IT'S *YOUR* RESPONSIBILITY AS HER *GUARDIAN.*
I, UH, I'M...NOT HER G-GUAR--
SHUT UP, AND *YOU'RE* COMING ALONG, *TOO*--
ZOUJOOOOK!
ONE! TWO!
THREE!
SKRU!

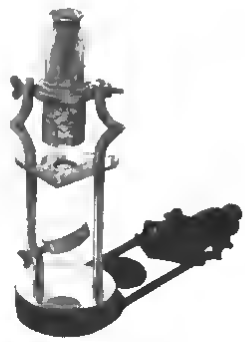
BOSS !!
AHHG...
NAKIZŌ-SAN!
GRR!
ISAKU! ARM UP!
JUST LOOK AT THEIR EYES! THEY'RE OUT FOR A FIGHT!

THE MOMENT OF *TRUTH!* THAT'S WHAT THE TŌSHU WOULD SAY!
ALL... RIGHT...
TIE 'EM UP! ALL THREE !!
I'M... ONE OF THEM?!
TO BE CONTINUED...!

NEXT MONTH:
THE SPARROW NET, Part 2 of 4

Blood on the streets in the city of Edo! An action-packed exercise in survival! Isaku reveals that he's got more going for him than long legs and pretty eyes, and Dōa shows that there's more under her hat than a stubborn mind. Hiroaki Samura's hilarious "Biography" text piece CONCLUDES, with another exclusive pinup—an added bonus found only in this monthly series. Next issue also features Stan Shaw's third back cover illustration, an image of Magatsu that will link up with Stan's other *Blade of the Immortal* back covers to form an exciting, extended image! See you soon—and don't forget your *jitte!*—Philip Simon

無限の住人



GLOSSARY

Akabon: Edo-era illustrated novels.

Bangashira: Head of the *banshū*.

Banshū: Officers serving under the shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the shogun himself.

Dōjō: A school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts; here, a training center for swordsmanship.

Dōshin: Police constables from the lower ranks of the samurai caste.

Dono: Archaic honorific used to show respect, usually for someone of higher rank.

Edo: Capital of pre-modern Japan. Later renamed Tokyo.

Gō-Rojū: Senior councilors to the shogun, picked from the most trusted feudal lords.

Hatchōbori: A district in Edo, and, in this case, slang for the police constables who patrol that area.

Honchō Suikoden: Also known as the *Yoshino Monogatari*. This Edo epic, published in 1773, was a Japanese re-telling of the Chinese Ming Dynasty classic *Shui-hu chuan*, known in the West as both *The Water Margin* and the *Outlaws of the Marsh*. The Japanese version includes the exploits of an Ainu warlord.

Ittō-ryū: The radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

Kachi: A foot soldier.

Kessen-chu: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal.

Mugai-ryū: A group of criminals who worked as assassins for the shogunate, earning their freedom by killing assigned targets. Disbanded by Habaki Kagimura.

Mutenichi-ryū: The sword school led by Rin's father (now deceased), destroyed by Anotsu Kagehisa.

Okara: Soy pulp, soft leftovers from making tofu, used in cooking or eaten alone.

Ryū: A sword school.

Toshū: Leader; master.

ABOUT THE SWASTIKA

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su*—"well" + *asti*—"he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the *swastika* was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction, and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. The *swastika*, whose arms point in a clockwise direction, is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the *swastika* has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782-3). *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork: The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue: Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the un-retouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

BIOGRAPHY

of Hiroaki Samura, Part Four

(Translated by Riko Frohnmayer)

1983 bade an end to the band's darkest period, as the members of Mother Fuckerrr (formerly known as Thunder Aquarius) re-imagined themselves again by playing more corporate arenas, rather than smaller, independent venues. In order to further overhaul their image, they bantered around different names, changing their moniker from Take It Easy to Pink Submarine Crystal to Kato, the Eternal Guy to The Tokyos . . . and finally settling on Hiroaki Samura. This last name was inspired by a notorious torture tool from the medieval era. Revitalized, the members self-published their first book, *Our Catatel*, that summer.

The book was criticized as absolute rubbish all over the United Kingdom. (One critic even wrote that he would eat his hat if the book became a hit.) However, it received relatively favorable reviews in Asian nations, and sales were strong there—especially in Japan. Their popularity with the Japanese audience began to rise at this point. Everything wasn't perfect, but the band mates seemed to enjoy their mild success. Unfortunately, personal tensions began to stir up problems.

The crisis began when new inkerist Ian A. Ian became frustrated with screen tone artist Mikael "Mic" Hanneman. "Mic was quite a talented tone worker, especially when dealing with science fiction or school-related material. However, when it came to period pieces, his tone was completely flat. I told [Sniper] Lee that this was going to be fatal to the unit, since we were about to focus on period pieces," Ian said at the time.

Penciller Nico Belladonna also criticized Hanneman. "Mikael fell in love with some American chick, and she made him crazy about Hollywood. He started dreaming about becoming a Hollywood movie star, and he gradually believed that he could be one. Nothing wrong with that, until we really started seeing a drastic deterioration in his screen tone skills."

However, even Nico wasn't immune from the drama of being fired. "A bit later, we were sure that Nico's drawing style was too old-fashioned for what we needed, so he could no longer be a part of our unit," said Sniper Lee. During the period that ensued, Ian, the skilled young inkerist, was the main creative force behind the group.

(Concludes next issue . . .)

Mikael Hanneman, one of Hiroaki Samura's founding members (screen tones).

LETTERS

Send letters and fan art to:

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BACK-COVER PINUP—"GIICHI" BY STAN SHAW!

Part two of Stan's four-part back cover series that will link up to form one large image! Stan is a professional illustrator who has worked for a wide variety of clients, from Alaska Airlines to *VIBE* magazine. His comic-book work includes appearances in *Dark Horse Presents*, *Cheval Noir*, and *Grendel: Black, White, and Red*. Next month: Stan tackles Magatsu!

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KRYPTONIA-DGP